

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAB-02
NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 /067 W
-----026906 102316Z /23

O 102126Z JUN 78

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7453

INFO AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PANAMA 04134

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PEPR, PN, OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION SEEKS MEETINGS WITH
PRESIDENTS

REFS: (A) CARACAS 4885, (B) PANAMA 3999, (C) CARACAS 5269

SUMMARY: DAVID SAMUDIO, LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENT,
IS ORGANIZING A MEETING BETWEEN PANAMANIAN OPPOSITION
FORCES AND THE CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT/STATE WHO WILL
BE VISITING PANAMA FOR THE EXCHANGE OF RATIFICATIONS
JUNE 16-17. HE SAYS VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT PEREZ
HAS ALREADY AGREED TO ATTEND. SAMUDIO CLAIMS THAT
PEREZ AGREES FULLY WITH HIS PROPOSAL FOR A RETURN
TO DEMOCRATIC FORMS IN PANAMA. FURTHERMORE,
SAMUDIO SAYS, PEREZ WILL URGE SUCH REFORMS ON TORRIJOS
AND ASK PRESIDENT CARTER TO DO THE SAME. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR SPOKE JUNE 10 WITH
LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENT DAVID SAMUDIO. SAMUDIO
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SAID THAT HE IS ORANIZING A MEETING BETWEEN
PANAMANIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS AND THE CHIEFS OF
OF GOVERNMENT AND STATE WHO WILL BE HERE FOR THE
EXCHANGE OF RATIFICATIONS. SAMUDIO SAID THAT
CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA,
HAD ALREADY AGREED TO ATTEND THE MEETING. HE SAID
THAT PEREZ PROMISED TO URGE COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT LOPEZ

MICHELSSEN TO ATTEND ALSO. SAMUDIO SAID HE PLANS TO CALL ON THE AMBASSADORS OF ALL OF THE ATTENDING COUNTRIES TUESDAY, JUNE 13, IN ORDER TO FORMALLY EXTEND INVITATIONS TO THE PRESIDENTS. (SAMUDIO HAS AN APPOINTMENT WITH AMBASSADOR JORDEN AT 3:00 P.M. THAT DAY.) SAMUDIO SAID THAT HE HAD NOT YET DECIDED ON THE TIME OR PLACE OR ON WHICH OPPOSITION LEADERS TO INVITE. BUT HE CLEARLY IMPLIED THAT ALL OF THE MAJOR OPPOSITION GROUPS WOULD BE INCLUDED.

2. SAMUDIO BRIEFLY DESCRIBED HIS RECENT MEETING WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ IN CARACAS. HE SAID THE MEETING LASTED FOUR HOURS. HE SAID THAT HIS PITCH TO PEREZ WAS ALONG THE FOLLOWING LINES: PEREZ AND VENEZUELA HAVE A REPUTATION FOR DEFENDING THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA BUT THEIR SUPPORT FOR TORRIJOS, A DICTATOR, HAS TARNISHED THAT IMAGE. VENEZUELA QUITE PROPERLY SUPPORTED TORRIJOS IN HIS EFFORT TO GET A MORE EQUITABLE TREATY; SO DID THE LIBERALS. BUT SUCH SUPPORT SHOULD NOT EXTEND TO HELPING TORRIJOS STAY IN POWER THROUGH NON-DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION SHOULD FORM A JOINT CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO REFORM THE CONSTITUTION. MINIMUM CHANGES SHOULD INCLUDE RESTORATION OF SEPARATION OF POWERS, DIRECT POPULAR

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ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT, FREEDOM OF ACTION FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTIONS WITHIN A YEAR. THE GOVERNMENT WHICH IS TO BE CHOSEN BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES IN OCTOBER SHOULD BE GIVEN A TRANSITIONAL AND PROVISIONAL TERM OF ONE AND ONE HALF YEARS. AT THE END OF THAT TIME, POWER SHOULD BE TURNED OVER TO THE NEWLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT. SAMUDIO SAID THAT PEREZ ACCEPTED THE VALIDITY OF HIS ARGUMENTS AND SAID THAT HE WOULD RAISE THE MATTER WITH TORRIJOS AND ASK CARTER TO DO THE SAME IN PANAMA THIS COMING WEEKEND.

3. SAMUDIO SAID THAT THE PANAMENISTA PARTY HAD INVITED HIM TO GREET FORMER PRESIDENT ARNULFO ARIAS WHEN HE RETURNS FROM EXILE THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 10. SAMUDIO SAID THAT HE DECLINED THE INVITATION AND THAT A MEETING OF THE LIBERAL PARTY LEADERS HAD DETERMINED THAT NO IMPORTANT PARTY OFFICIALS SHOULD ATTEND THE ARRIVAL CEREMONY OR THE RALLY WHICH IS SCHEDULED TO FOLLOW IT. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT HE EXPECTED MANY LIBERALS TO BE IN THE CROWDS TO GREET ARIAS. FIFTY PERCENT OR MORE OF THE CROWDS

WILL BE GENUINE ARNULFISTAS, BUT MANY OTHERS
WILL BE THE DISAFFECTED, WHO ARE MERELY EXPRESSING
THEIR UNHAPPINESS WITH THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT.

4. AS FOR FUTURE LIBERAL COOPERATION WITH ARIAS AND
THE PANAMENISTAS, SAMUIDO SAID THAT IT WILL
DEPEND ON WHAT ARIAS' GOALS APPEAR TO BE. IF HE
SIMPLY WANTS TO STAGE A COUP TO REPLACE TORRIJOS
WITH HIMSELF, THEN THE LIBERALS WILL HAVE NOTHING
TO DO WITH HIM. IF HE UNDERTAKES AN ANTI-TREATY

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CAMPAIGN, THE LIBERALS WILL NOT SUPPORT HIM. ON
THE OTHER HAND, IF HE WILL COOPERATE TO RESTORE
DEMOCRATIC FORMS, THE LIBERALS WILL WORK WITH HIM.

5.COMMENT: THERE IS A SUBSTANTIAL MINORITY IN THE
LIBERAL LEADERSHIP WHICH WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A CLOSER
RELATIONSHIP WITH ARIAS' PARTY. FEW LIBERALS
WOULD LIKE TO SEE ARIAS BACK IN POWER, EVEN IF HE
WERE IN TANDEM WITH THE LIBERALS. BUT MANY

BELIEVE THAT ONLY BY UNIFIED ACTION CAN THE OPPOSITION
HOPE TO EITHER BRING TORRIJOS DOWN OR FORCE
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES WHICH WOULD ALLOW A TRANSFER
OF POWER. THIS MINORITY IS PREPARED TO WAIT UNTIL
TORRIJOS IS OUT OF THE WAY BEFORE FIGURING OUT HOW
TO PICK UP THE PIECES.

6. TORRIJOS WILL HARDLY WELCOME THE PROSPECT OF A

MEETING OF PRESIDENTS WITH THE OPPOSITION. THE ARRIVAL
OF ARIAS ON THE SCENE PUTS A NEW POLITICAL JOKER
IN THE DECK, AND TORRIJOS AND MANY OF HIS PEOPLE
ARE EDGY. BUT IT SEEMS TO US HE WILL JUST HAVE
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TO GRIN AND BEAR IT -- FOR NOW. JORDEN

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